DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 461 EC 307 031

AUTHOR	Ysseldyke, James E.; Thurlow, Martha L.
TITLE	Assessment and Acccountability for Students with Disabilities: 1999 Status Update and Emerging Issues.
INSTITUTION	National Center on Educational Outcomes, Minneapolis, MN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.; Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	10p.
CONTRACT	H159C00004; H159C50004
AVAILABLE FROM	National Center on Educational Outcomes, College of Education, University of Minnesota, 350 Elliott Hall, 75 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN 55455; Tel: 612-626-1530; Fax: 612-624-0879; Web site: www.coled.umn.edu/nceo
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; *Data Collection; *Disabilities; *Educational Assessment; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; *Graduation Requirements; Intervention; Outcomes of Education; State Programs; Student Evaluation; *Student Participation; Testing Problems
IDENTIFIERS	Alternative Assessment; *Testing Accommodations (Disabilities)

ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the present and past status of students with disabilities in educational assessment and accountability systems, and highlights the critical emerging issues to be addressed. Issues include participation in accountability systems, graduation requirements, data management, accommodations, alternate assessments, reporting, and increasing performance. For each issue, current relevant facts are provided, along with strategies to achieve further inclusion of students with disabilities in assessment and accountability systems. Some recommendations are to: (1) encourage the inclusion of scores of students with disabilities in accountability systems; (2) offer strategies to states for counting and reporting assessment results of all students; (3) identify a set of guiding principles for including students with disabilities in graduation requirements; (4) urge states to allow testing accommodations, coursework adaptations, and the option of demonstrating skills in alternative ways for students with disabilities; (5) encourage states and districts to form accommodation advisory groups and support training on accommodation; (6) continue to provide examples of alternate assessments and suggest a model for best practice in alternate assessments; (7) highlight best practices in reporting the scores of students with disabilities; and (8) fund projects to examine the effects of interventions on test scores and identify effective interventions. (CR)

ED 427 461

Assessment and Accountability for Students with Disabilities
1999 Status Update and Emerging Issues

James E. Ysseldyke, Director
Martha L. Thurlow, Associate Director

EC 307 031

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ysseldyke
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Assessment and Accountability for Students with Disabilities
1999 Status Update and Emerging Issues

National Center on Educational Outcomes
James E. Ysseldyke, Director
Martha L. Thurlow, Associate Director

College of Education • University of Minnesota
Phone: 612-626-1530 •• 350 Elliott Hall 75 East River Road Minneapolis, MN 55455 •• Fax: 612-624-0879
www.coled.umn.edu/nceo

NCEO's primary mission is to work with states and federal agencies on issues related to the results of education for students with disabilities, particularly related to their participation in large-scale assessments and accountability systems. While there have been tremendous strides in the past eight years in the recognition that students with disabilities are part of the educational system and that the system is responsible for the results of their education, there are many continuing and emerging issues to address. This page summarizes the present and past status of students with disabilities in assessment and accountability systems, and highlights the critical emerging issues to be addressed. Each of the Emerging Issues is discussed in greater detail on attached pages.

Current Status	Past Status	Emerging Issues
All states with active assessment systems have written guidelines for the participation and accommodation of students with disabilities in assessments.	Fewer than half the states had written guidelines for the participation and accommodation of students with disabilities in assessments.	While IDEA 97 requires states and districts to include students with disabilities in their assessments, it does not require that students with disabilities be included in state and district accountability systems.
Forty states now have some type of high stakes accountability system for schools. Twenty have both student and system accountability.	While several states had minimal competency tests, few had high stakes accountability for school systems.	Pressure to increase graduation requirements exists in states and districts, yet there is much disagreement about what should be required of students with disabilities and whether they should work toward a different diploma.
Participation rates in state assessments have increased significantly, though many still cannot give specific percentages.	Most states had 10% or fewer of their students with disabilities participating in state assessments.	Current data management systems in many states and districts do not produce useful data on students with disabilities.
Allowed accommodations in states and districts are quite varied, and include setting, scheduling, timing, presentation, response, and others.	A relatively limited array of accommodations were available in the few states that had written guidelines about accommodations.	Variability in approved accommodations creates disadvantages for some students with disabilities, and relies too heavily on opinions of test developers.
Most states are now either designing or developing their alternate assessments.	Few states were considering how to assess students who could not take the statewide assessment.	Many states and districts are struggling with the development of alternate assessments because the process raises many other issues.
In 1997/98, 13 states reported on the performance of students with disabilities in public reports.	States did not report on the performance of students with disabilities in their public reports.	Few states have reported participation and performance data, and there are no guidelines on how these data should be reported.
Performance data indicate that students are not performing well on assessments given by states.	No data were available to know how well students were performing.	States and districts lack information on strategies directed specifically at how to improve the performance of students with disabilities on large-scale assessments.

NCEO was established in 1990 through a cooperative agreement (H159C00004/H159C50004) with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Points of view expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Department or Offices within it.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Participation in Accountability Systems

While IDEA 97 requires states and districts to include students with disabilities in their assessments, it does not require that students with disabilities be included in state and district accountability systems.

Facts:

- Forty states have accountability systems with consequences for districts, schools, and/or staff: 22 states include positive consequences in their systems (e.g., accreditation, cash rewards, honors), 15 states use negative consequences (e.g., school reconstitution, takeover, job loss), and 18 publicly report scores (often in a list ranked in order of performance).

- These types of accountability systems often create considerable pressure to improve students' scores. This pressure can result in improvements in instruction as well as "teaching to the test." However, it can also result in inappropriate practices, such as excluding students not expected to do well.

- Not all of the states with accountability systems include the scores of students with disabilities in these systems. An analysis of participation and accommodations policies in 1995 suggested that 14 of 24 states with written guidelines on reporting excluded the scores of students with disabilities in some aspect of their accountability systems.

- Whenever there is a legitimate way to push poor performing students out of the accountability system, there is a tendency to do so. Thus, if students who participate in the alternate assessment are not included in a state's accountability system, there will be a tendency to push more and more students into the alternate assessment rather than the regular state or district assessment.

Strategies:

- Support must continue to be given to the only state (Kentucky) that now includes the scores of all students with disabilities in its accountability system (both those in the regular assessment and those in the alternate assessment). Maryland is considering the inclusion of the scores of students in its alternate assessment in its overall accountability system. This should be encouraged across all states.

- NCEO is beginning a detailed analysis of how students with disabilities "count" in state accountability systems. Finding this information requires considerable detective work since policies often are found only in legislation or other obscure documents. State department personnel do not always know whether or how the scores of students with disabilities are included in accountability systems. States should be offered strategies for counting and reporting assessment results of all students.

Graduation Requirements

Pressure to increase graduation requirements exists in states and districts, yet there is considerable disagreement and confusion about what should be required of students with disabilities.

Facts:

- States have raised and are continuing to raise their requirements for graduation. Still, states vary considerably in their graduation requirements for students in general; this variability is multiplied many times over when students with disabilities are considered. [Social promotion issues are on the heels of graduation requirement issues; much of what is recommended for graduation requirements carries over to promotion policies.]

- The source of graduation requirements varies; they are sometimes set at the state level, sometimes at the local level (including by IEP teams), and sometimes through a mix of state and local policies.

- An array of exit options are available to students with and without disabilities; in all but nine states there are alternative types of exit documents available to all students (e.g., certificate of attendance, honors diplomas, occupational diploma, etc.), and in many states there are exit documents available to students with disabilities not available to other students (e.g., IEP diploma, special diploma, etc.).

- Modified coursework to meet course credit requirements is the most common type of alteration in requirements provided to students with disabilities. Even in states with graduation exams that students must pass, modifications of coursework are allowed.

- IEP completion is not a universally accepted way for students with disabilities to meet graduation requirements; just over 10% of states allow students to receive a standard diploma by completing their IEPs.

- A common knowledge base about graduation requirements within state departments does not exist. Special educators do not necessarily recognize that students with disabilities can earn honors diplomas, and general educators do not necessarily recognize that students with disabilities may need different ways to demonstrate that they can meet graduation requirements (e.g., performance assessments).

Strategies:

- Recognize that there is not consistent meaning or policies about graduation across the states, but identify a set of guiding principles for including students with disabilities in the requirements.

- Urge states to allow testing accommodations, coursework adaptations, and the option of demonstrating skills in alternative ways (e.g., through portfolios or performances, etc.) for students with disabilities.

- Courts have generally held that states must provide 3-4 years notice before holding students responsible for meeting changed standards (e.g., passing graduation exams). Because of past exclusion of students with disabilities from the general education curriculum and low expectations, for students with disabilities, changed standards should be implemented for the cohort of students in the early elementary grades.

Data Management

Current data management systems in many states and districts do not produce useful data on students with disabilities.

Facts:

- Just over 10 states reported on the participation and/or performance of students with disabilities in their public reports available in 1997/98.
- Some states have indicated that they do not have a way to identify the data of students with disabilities in their state assessment data.
- Many states do not keep information in their data bases on the use of accommodations, information that might help us better understand the use of accommodations and their effects.
- There continues to be in most states a disconnect between child count data and data on students with disabilities who should and actually do participate in testing at the time that tests are administered.

Strategies:

- Several states have successfully introduced data management techniques into their assessment programs. These techniques should be described for other states.
- While child count data can be used to monitor the participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments, states should be urged to provide more accurate data for monitors to use. How the data are more accurate should be demonstrated.

Accommodations

Variability in approved accommodations creates disadvantages for some students with disabilities, and relies too heavily on opinions of test developers.

Facts:

- States continue to vary considerably in the accommodations that are allowed and not allowed. They also vary in whether they "accept" the scores produced when accommodations are used.
- Decisions about what accommodations are allowed vary somewhat as a function of whether the test is high stakes for students or systems, and whether the test is a norm-referenced test (NRT) or a criterion-referenced test (CRT).
- Language problems persist. The terms accommodations, modifications, alterations and other terms are used to mean different things in different places. The lack of a common language can make discussions about the use of accommodations in high stakes situations (e.g., graduation exams) very difficult.
- Determinations about accommodations continue to be based almost exclusively on opinions, which all too often are formed on the basis of underlying attitudes and beliefs about disability.
- Because almost all states contract with test development companies for their state assessments, and districts tend to use "off-the-shelf" tests, accommodations policies often are driven by test developers, who too often have a very limited perspective of "standard" testing requirements.
- Test developers are sometimes refusing to produce scores for students who use accommodations because the "scores are invalid" or the "meaning of the scores is different," etc.
- Even when states and districts have good accommodations policies, practitioners and IEP teams often do not know what they are, or have their own attitudes that interfere with appropriate decision making.

Strategies:

- Encourage states (and districts) to insist on item construction and development procedures that include all students when they are setting up contracts for the development of tests.
- Suggest that states and districts form accommodations advisory groups that push the envelope on acceptable accommodations.
- Support training on accommodations.
- Continue to support research, perhaps with test development companies, on accommodations in large-scale assessments.
- Insist that scores be reported for all students, even those who use "unacceptable" accommodations in order to participate in testing. Allow these scores to be reported separately if necessary.

Alternate Assessments

Many states and districts are struggling with the development of alternate assessments because these assessments raise many other issues.

Facts:

- States and districts are all over the board in their decisions about who should take alternate assessments. Rather than producing increases in the participation of students in regular assessments, the alternate assessment requirement in many places is being viewed as the beginning of a "special education assessment."

- The "gray area kids" become the focus of discussions about alternate assessments. What is to be done for students who can take regular large-scale assessments but are not expected to perform well?

- Confusion also has arisen because there are some students who will not be able to demonstrate their skills through typical paper and pencil tests, but who are learning the same content as other students. Rather than considering other ways to demonstrate the same knowledge, there is a tendency to want to have these students in the alternate assessment. Then, these students are combined with students whose cognitive functioning is very low and who may not be learning the same content.

- Many individuals balk at the discussion of "different standards," "different curriculum," and other terms that suggest a separateness for some small percentage of students. This makes it even more difficult to define the population for whom the alternate assessment is appropriate.

- There is considerable disagreement about whether students in the alternate assessment can earn a standard diploma.

- Because state systems vary so much, the alternate assessments that are to complement the existing systems are bound to vary as well.

Strategies:

- Continue to provide examples of alternate assessments that are viewed as meeting the letter and intent of the law.

- Convene in a national meeting state representatives, advocates, and politicians to suggest a model of best practice in alternate assessments.

- Be very clear that the alternate assessment should be used with only a very small percentage of the student population (less than 2 percent).

Reporting

Few states have reported participation and performance data, and there are no guidelines on how these data should be reported.

Facts:

- Data that have been reported indicate that students with disabilities perform significantly below other students.
- There is not consistency in whether states include the scores of students with disabilities in their overall scores or just report them separately.
- It is not clear that anyone has thought about the best way to present and explain data to avoid unintended consequences.
- Additional analysis of what scores are telling us is needed. NCEO is currently exploring whether there are trends in how performance compares across grades, and whether sufficient data exist to look at data longitudinally to determine whether reforms are making a difference for students with disabilities.

Strategies:

- Highlight best practices (examples, nonexamples) in reporting the scores of students with disabilities.
- Produce guidelines for reporting the scores of students with disabilities.
- Show how to use data to plan for improvements in teaching, etc.
- Track public reports to find out about participation rates and performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments.

Increasing Performance

States and districts lack information on strategies directed specifically at how to improve the performance of students with disabilities on large-scale assessments.

Facts:

- For the most part, state and districts have not considered how best to prepare students to take large-scale assessments. Most have been stuck in the mode of thinking that it is too emotionally distressing for these students to participate.
- Students have often been excluded from test preparation and remedial classes because they receive special education services or are not seen as being viable candidates for such training.
- Decisions about what accommodations students use during large-scale assessments often are based on the logistics of providing accommodations rather than the needs of individual students.

Strategies:

- Fund projects to examine the effects of interventions on test scores and that identify effective interventions for improving large-scale test performance.
- Identify characteristics of assessment programs that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Provide guidance on how to make good decisions about test participation; address the logistics of having students with disabilities participate in large-scale assessments.